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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 032321

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STATE FOR EAP/CM, DRL and IRF
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/16

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: Religious Round-up: Amcit Missionaries Denied
Visas/Permits, Others Detained and New GZ Bishop

REF: A) Guangzhou 21213; B) Beijing 9291

11. (U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg.
Reason 1.4 (d).

12. (C) SUMMARY: Several recent incidents may highlight the Guangzhou's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) intent to make a religiously restrictive environment for Christian missionaries. Four Amcit Protestant "tentmaker" missionaries were recently denied permission to stay in China. Three months earlier, two other missionaries were detained for participating in an unregistered bible study and were ordered to leave China within 24 hours. One of the missionaries told poloff that this was the first deportation of one of his organization's missionaries from China. Sources also say that Guangzhou has quietly elected a new bishop, the election of whom could spark a new conflict with the Vatican. END SUMMARY.

Tight Control of Protestant "Tentmakers"

13. (SBU) In recent months, we have been informed of possible PRC government discrimination of four different Amcit Protestant "tentmakers" (missionaries who maintain full-time jobs) in Guangzhou. We do not know the organizations these missionaries represent, but they have reportedly been working in Guangzhou for a number of years either as English language teachers or in small businesses. Two of the missionaries have been denied extension of residency permits and two others were denied visa extensions. The missionaries may now be applying for tourist visas, rather than for work permits or residency permits, in order to continue their work in China.

Missionaries Detained

14. (C) Several missionaries have also been detained and deported from China. A few months ago Amcits Jason Benedict and Jerome Smith had been in China for less than two weeks before they were detained on August 29 for leading an unregistered bible study. The men were missionaries from the group, Accelerating International Mission Strategies (AIMS), based in Virginia Beach, VA. On October 18, Benedict contacted Congenoff over the phone from the United States to provide details about the incident. At the time he and his colleague were detained, they were leading a prayer and bible study group of 30

Chinese citizens. During the meeting, approximately 40 Public Security Bureau (PSB) officers broke into the apartment. They confiscated the bibles and day-planner of one of the Chinese Christian leaders and told Benedict to turn off his mobile phone. Benedict, Smith and a few Chinese Christian leaders were immediately taken to a local PSB station. The detainees were questioned separately for about three hours. A representative from the Baiyun District (Guangzhou Municipality) Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) led the questioning, which focused on the Amcits' Chinese contacts, specifically the names of the Chinese organization, religious leaders and followers. The following day, after Consulate intervention, PSB officers read a statement that the Amcits had participated in "illegal religious activities" and instructed them to leave mainland China by the following day.

New Bishop in Guangzhou

15. (C) The Consulate has heard from a number of sources that in October, after a number of years without a bishop, Guangzhou elected a new bishop. Bishop Jin, age 47, was the youngest and most qualified of the candidates and received 36 of a total 44 votes. The Vatican has yet to confirm the election and contacts were unsure why the election has been kept a secret. In April and May, Bishops for Kunming City and Anhui province were elected by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (the State organization that oversees the Catholic Church in China) without Vatican approval (ref B). The elections received much publicity, leading to a diplomatic conflict between the Vatican and Beijing. It is unclear whether this election will have the same effect.

Comment: "The Nail that Sticks Up"

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16. (C) While detention and harassment of American missionaries has not been a frequent occurrence in Guangdong lately, there is no question that, perhaps due to its close proximity to Hong Kong's vocal Falun Gong activists, the Provincial RAB keeps a much closer watch on the area's religious groups. Contacts have reported that Guangzhou's religious atmosphere towards Christians is more restrictive than in the Dongguan or Shenzhen. For example, the Guangzhou International Christian Fellowship (GICF) rigorously checks passports of visitors to its service (to ensure no local Chinese visitors), whereas expatriate churches in other cities are more relaxed (ref A). At the same time, there are missionaries and local Chinese Christians working in Guangdong's unregistered churches without hindrance generally as long as they keep a low profile. It is possible that this case matches the Chinese proverb, "The nail that sticks up gets pounded down."

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